Listen

A Seeker's Resource for Spiritual Direction

APRIL 2012 VOL 6: ISSUE 2

Cultivate Spiritual Awareness

Mentors teach and guide us. I know this to be true: *when the student is ready, the teacher will come*. Perhaps you do too. Who are the important people who have arrived in your life at distinctive times and places? At this time—are you seeking to learn, know, or experience something specific that you can identify and name? Do you wrestle with an inner restlessness that may want to reveal something to you about your life, work, a relationship, action of service, creative endeavor, or spiritual inquiry? Have you experienced a person approaching you for mentoring or guidance?

A mentor can be a valuable person who illuminates life lessons and insights. Mentors appear in many forms, and often surprise or challenge us. Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī, a thirteenth century Persian Muslim poet, theologian, and Sufi mystic wrote, "The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you; Don't go back to sleep. You must ask for what you really want; Don't go back to sleep. People are going back and forth across the doorsill where the two worlds touch. The door is round and open. Don't go back to sleep."

Central to our human existence and evolution is the capacity to listen. In order to listen deeply, many find it helpful to make a commitment to a spiritual practice. A spiritual practice allows us to participate in dynamic stillness—a moment of strength when we think we cannot go on, a



Eurasian Oystercatcher — *Haematopus ostralegus*

rootedness in the present moment. A regular spiritual practice develops the necessary courage and resiliency to reconcile dissonance and polarity.

When we cultivate and grow peace in our hearts, learn with our bodies and minds, and contribute to our families and communities, an opportunity presents itself: live with integrity and awareness. Every day we have the choice to up-level our communication with others—and our own inner dialogue—agreeing to align and interact with the best parts of ourselves, not the weakest. We can make a promise to be truth-tellers. When our actions generate from this center, we often discover a teacher or mentor arrives to help us grow in ways we may currently name and desire, or perhaps only intuit. When we wake up, tell the truth, and are faithful to our spiritual practice, unforeseen possibility and potential shows up!

Mentors and spiritual guides assist us along the way, until one day, our fidelity to a spiritual practice and listening deeply, creates an awareness that that we have become the mentors, examples, and witnesses to a life of authentic engagement and flow, where the breeze at dawn or dusk whispers secrets to our awakened life.

REFLECT

Stop everything you are doing, be still. Ask yourself, and then ponder:

- Who are my mentors?
- How am I a mentor or witness to others?
- What is it I truly desire in my life?
- Dare I believe in possibility?
- Am I ready to sort things in—and out—to create the time and space for my deepest calling, and heart desires?
- How might a spiritual director or guide accompany me in my journey?

—Pegge Erkeneff

SEEDS OF INTEREST:

- Field Guide: *The Essence of Balancing Stones*
- Poem: Brave Enough
- Global Resources
- Poem: Nocturne
- Ask Owl

The Essence of Balancing Stones

Balancing stones seems unusual in its appearance, yet in a sense can be found in many places where the human has recognized it as something special, something sacred to lay some stones or rocks on the top of one another. It looks quite difficult to pile a couple of stones one on top of another; in fact it is not easy to put them together just by balancing those stones one by one. Naturally, the questions come out. "Why have the people done this?" "What for?" "Are there any particular meanings in it?" "How can you do balance stones?" "Why is it called as *balancing stones?"*



I do *balancing stones* as one of my spiritual practices and also do this just before the session of spiritual direction with my spiritual directee. I understand three aspects of *balancing stones*: spiritual practice; a part of the process of spiritual direction; and as an expression of the human art.

At first, I do this for my spiritual practice, for I need to focus on balancing each of the stones with patience to find out the very spot in two stones, and then another very spot in other stones to pile them up. Once I discover the very spot, the stones will be stable even if the wind blows. *Balancing stones* is done outside, that is, in nature; along the mountain roads, the rivers, the ocean beaches, or the top of the hills. They are all in nature so far in its history. Therefore, I have to concentrate to search for the spot for the two stones to be balanced for sure, and I become calm knowing that if I am not thinking at all, and then, even not knowing that I am not thinking of anything. It is a state of inner peacefulness and joyfulness.

Secondly, before starting a spiritual direction session, I prepare myself with prayer for my spiritual directee. Similarly if you were to concentrate on doing this, your prayer might be gone, but prayer will be within you, and will be deeper than ever before. For a spiritual director, when your prayer will be deeper without words, prayer will make you ready to welcome your spiritual directee, and it will last during the session or even after that. Spiritual direction then becomes a prayer itself without words, and will invite the presence of the Spirit as a true companion to guide you and your spiritual directee on the journey no matter how or no matter where the Spirit brings the whole session. *Balancing stones* will foster your inner sense to embrace the Spirit for your spiritual directee as though you and your spiritual directee were walking together on the same path.

Thirdly, above all, *balancing stones* is an expression of the human feelings, sensitivities, and prayers as a work of art. Therefore, it is expressed in various ways:

Balancing stones might be very simply piled on another stones;

Balancing stones might be more technically sophisticated to express feelings and emotions in hearts and souls;

Balancing stones might be created without many thoughts or intentions just in order to well up the novelty out of the primal creativity deep within.

In the first case, *balancing stones* have been seen and are seen always as the simplest expression of heartfelt gratitude and appreciation for nature and others.

In the second expression, *balancing stones* is often seen as artistic beauty done with highly technical ways to express feelings, thoughts, and intentions as the self-expressions.

Thirdly, *balancing stones* could be used as one of the spiritual practices to avoid the obstacles in mind, and to be one with stillness within. Additionally, *balancing stones* can also be utilized for a spiritual director to prepare to welcome both the spiritual directee and the Spirit, and to foster the acceptance and embracement for the Spirit to guide the spiritual director and the spiritual directee without any intentions and purposes of the human.

The primordial aim in the essence of *balancing stones* could be found most profoundly in the spiritual practice for you to be as you are, and in the events of spiritual direction for you to be truly with the spiritual directee and the presence of the Spirit.

—Reverend Dr. Masaaki F. Shibano, is a pastor of the United Church of Christ in Japan, a spiritual director, and a supervisor for spiritual directors. He is the executive director at Life Process Care Center, Osaka, Japan.



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Listen is an outreach publication of Spiritual Directors International. When you visit the SDI website at **www.sdiworld.org**, you can learn about retreats, programs, conferences, and other educational events related to spiritual companionship. You can read descriptions of the spiritual direction relationship from a variety of spiritual traditions, and discover excellent questions to ask yourself and any potential spiritual directors you choose to interview. To locate a spiritual director or guide, go online to *Seek and Find: A Worldwide Resource Guide of Available Spiritual Directors*. More than 6,000 spiritual directors are listed by geographical location at **www.sdiworld.org**.



Brave Enough

Ah! Precious Lover of Lovers

How choice to lie in Your embrace

Shamelessly ravished

Such unspeakable intimacy

Limp I lie in ecstasy's postlude

Listening to Spirit's whisper

Filling me, telling me

Be brave enough

to come again.

– Karen (Wells) Gibbs [South Australia, Australia]

GLOBAL RESOURCES: *Supporting Your Spiritual Journey*

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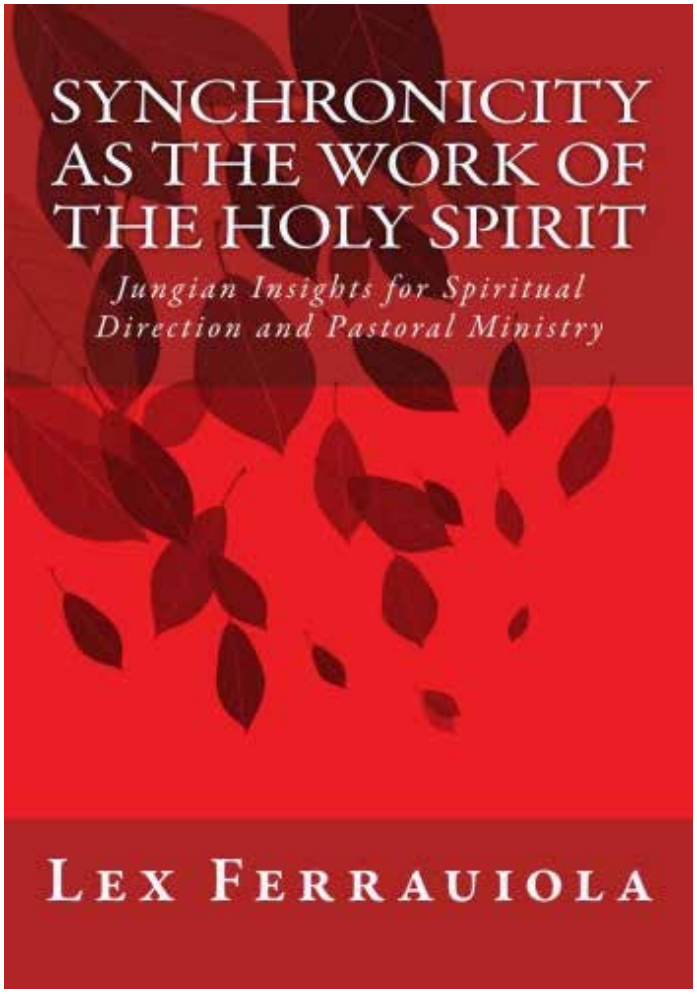
Join more than 6,500 people in a global contemplative, multi-faith learning community called Spiritual Directors International. For more than twenty years, SDI has been committed to compassionate listening around the world and across traditions. Everyone who cares about spiritual companionship is invited to become a member of Spiritual Directors International, a charitable nonprofit serving the educational needs of people who offer spiritual companionship.
www.sdiworld.org

- Connect on Facebook: *Spiritual Directors International for spiritual care.*
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SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Spiritual direction explores a deeper relationship with the spiritual aspect of being human. Simply put, spiritual direction is helping people tell their sacred stories everyday. Descriptions of a spiritual guidance relationship include *Anam Cara*, spiritual accompaniment, spiritual companioning, spiritual direction, spiritual guidance, spiritual mentoring, sacred friendship, and soul friendship. How would you describe a relationship with another person—or group—that listens deeply to you, and receives *your* sacred life story?





Synchronicity was defined by C. G. Jung as the experience of meaningful coincidences that are not causally related; coincidences that are not mere accidents or good fortune but, as Jung believed, signs created by an integrated and purposeful universe to touch the lives of individuals and lead them to integration and wholeness. The author explores this Jungian concept in relation to the theology of the Holy Spirit. His thesis is that synchronicity is the work of the Holy Spirit tapping us on the shoulder and pointing the way; and that this Jungian insight can provide pastoral ministers and spiritual directors with a new language and understanding for discerning the promptings of the Holy Spirit at work within their lives and the lives of those to whom they minister.

Lex Ferrauiola is a husband, a father and an ordained Catholic deacon. He holds a BA in Philosophy and a MA in Pastoral Ministry.

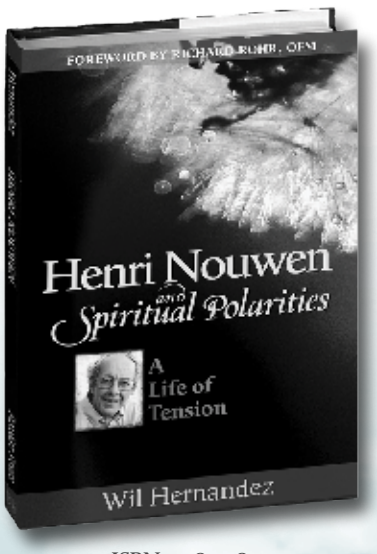
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Nocturne

I've been sitting up at night again
with the moon,
slipped between the still wet grass and darkness
gazing skyward
into the unlit deep.
Silence is a blanket,
the mystery that surrounds us.
Many things arrive on their own
away from the light;
many thoughts that go unanswered
during the day.
I look at the sky –
the deepening of color,
the blue and gray and white releasing
echoes of the tide…
If only I could wrap the moon in darkness.

– Sarah Rehfeldt [Washington, USA]



Just Released!

"Wil Hernandez offers a considerable gift to those of us on the journey toward Christian spiritual maturity. His interpretation of Nouwen's life and writings does not dodge the ambiguity and tension that constitute contemporary life. But his understanding of Nouwen does reveal creative ways to move in and through brokenness, weakness and suffering into the unfailing embrace of the Beloved. A compelling read."

– **Norvene Vest,** spiritual director and author of *Re-Visioning Theology*

"Our spiritual journey, a real mixture of contradictions, mystery, compassion and sometimes chaos, is out of place in a world that prefers order, closure, and tidiness. Henri Nouwen's practice of 'befriending'—life is not 'either-or' but 'both-and'—is an invitation to embrace our fullness precisely because we invite both sorrow and love, untidiness and beauty into our exquisitely human world. Wil Hernandez's portrait of Henri Nouwen's life of tension is grace-giving indeed."

– **Terry Hershey,** author of *The Power of Pause: becoming more by doing less*

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Wil is a retreat leader, counselor, and spiritual director in private practice. Aside from doing retreats, lectures, seminars and workshops all over the U.S. and abroad, he also teaches courses on the spirituality of Henri Nouwen at various Catholic and Protestant seminaries and universities across the country. His website is www.nouwenlegacy.com





Question: Can you please describe spiritual direction? It seems to me that people who don't have a faith community would want to meet with a spiritual guide, or maybe someone who has a lot of questions about faith, prayer, contemplative practice, and so forth. Another question: does a spiritual director advise me? I hear more and more about spiritual guidance, and would appreciate a brief, concise explanation. Can both men and women, of any age go to spiritual direction?

Hoot Hoot: Excellent questions! If you talked to several spiritual directors you would hear similarities and differences in their responses. First of all, everyone can meet with a spiritual director—men and women, of all ages. Spiritual guidance is not gender or age specific. The core question to ask yourself and reflect upon is,

"What is transpiring and percolating in my life that might be well served by meeting regularly with a compassionate listener, someone who is trained in discernment?"

People choose to meet with a spiritual guide when they explore and cultivate their life of prayer, meditation, and contemplation, during a time when they wrestle with institutions and authorities, or inner promptings that invite change, and when healing and wholeness is desired in one's life. A spiritual director tunes into the animating Spirit that is central to life. For example, a spiritual director rarely offers advice, and instead listens intently, and may ask questions that enable someone to learn what he or she didn't know they already knew. Often, a spiritual guide has an *artists palette* or *tool bag* of spiritual practices and ideas that may spark something for a new or deepened spiritual practice, and enable an ability to recognize and express significance in daily life.

A spiritual director might be the safe harbor for someone's deepest angst that desires to be shared and received. God, the Sacred, Holy One, or Ultimate Reality might be named, or unnamed. Seekers with no experience in religion meet with spiritual directors. Individuals who dwell in a specific faith community meet with spiritual guides. Leaders seek spiritual direction. Groups listen together during spiritual direction. Spiritual direction has been described as compassionate listening.

If you would like to learn how to locate a spiritual director, and good interview questions to ask potential spiritual directors, please visit www.sdiworld.org, or sign-up for a free one-hour teleconference, "How to Seek and Find a Spiritual Director."

—If you have a question for Owl, please e-mail Listen@sdiworld.org.



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Al servicio de lo sacro alrededor del mundo y a través de las tradiciones …"

—Translated by Marta Rios and Xavier Ortiz Monasterio

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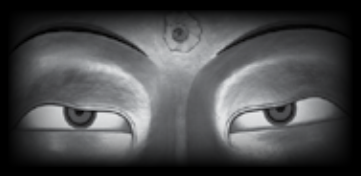
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